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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the planning, preparation, and implementation efforts to operate a 45-15 pilot program in Virginia Beach, Virginia. This year-round schools project, undertaken in November 1971, required 18 months of planning. Electing to use a cycled-attendance plan, the program was established in selected schools to ascertain its feasibility in solving overcrowded space problems. Students attend classes for 45 school days and vacation for 15 school days with four such cycles equalling a normal school year. One-third more space becomes available during each 45-day cycle. The pilot project was implemented to generate decision-making data before committing all schools and resources to the program. Evaluation activities were planned to determine the effect of cycle attendance, year-round education on learning, the community, and the expenditures of capital and operation funds. At the time of this report, evaluation data was not yet available. (Author/DW)

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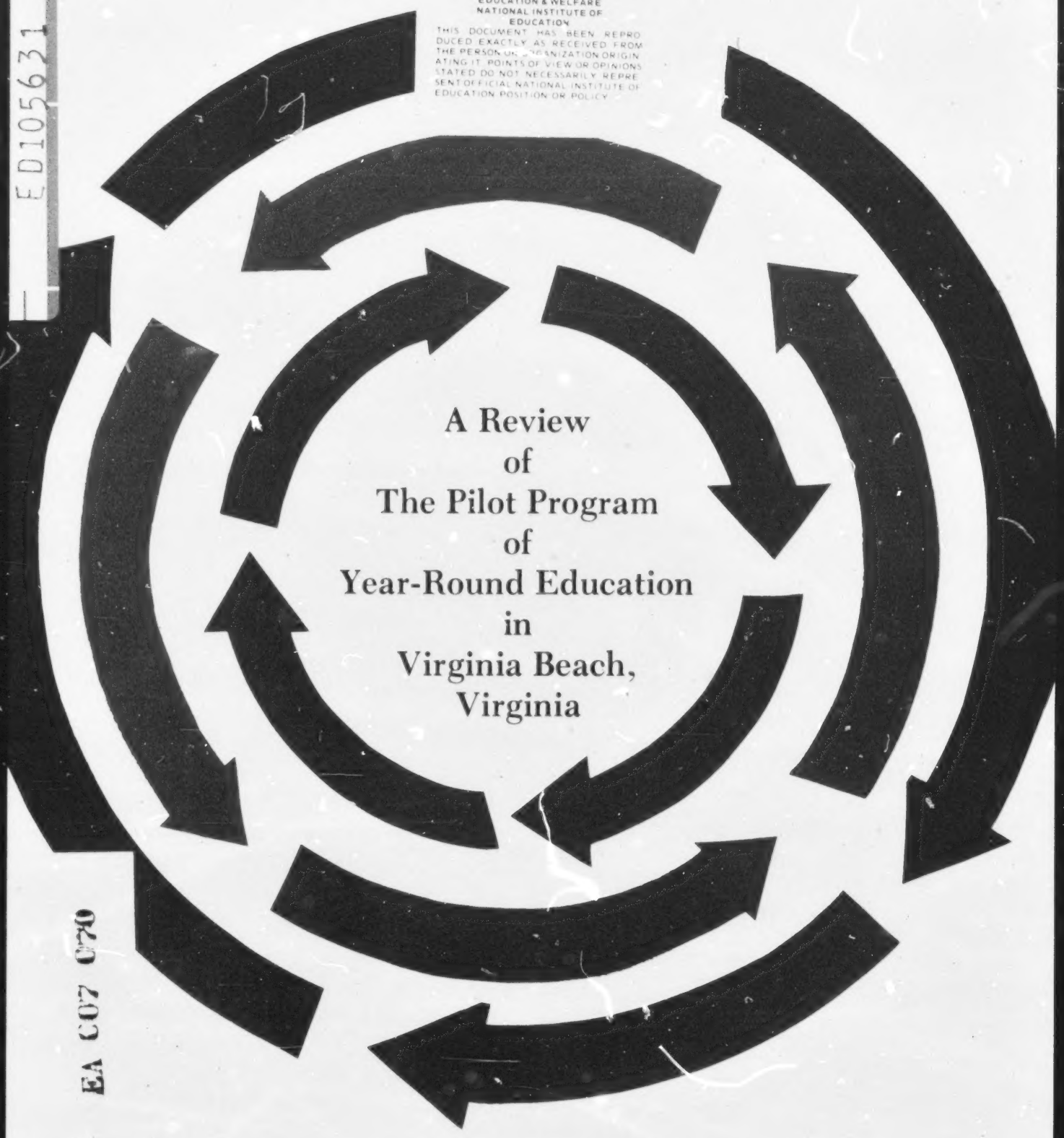

A Review of The Pilot Program of Year-Round Education in Virginia Beach, Virginia

EA 007 020

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Virginia Beach is the fastest growing city in the state of Virginia. The population has nearly doubled in the past ten years and the number of children in the city schools has jumped from 26,600 in 1963 to 52,000 in 1974. To keep pace with this growth, three high schools, three junior high schools, 15 elementary schools, and a vocational-technical school have been constructed in Virginia Beach in the last decade giving the city a total of 49 public school facilities. During this same period, 28 additions have been built on existing schools. Three additional junior high schools and an elementary school are under construction at the present time.

Recognizing that the need for additional classrooms in Virginia Beach could not be met by construction alone, the School Board appointed a study committee in the fall of 1971 to look into alternatives for housing the burgeoning student population. After conducting a series of public hearings, collecting a considerable amount of data, and carefully studying the many possibilities, the committee recommended that the School Board adopt a combination of alternatives to solve the space problem. This combination included the construction of three new junior high schools and one elementary school, continuation of the eight-period day on the secondary level with students attending school either 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. or 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and continuation of the use of portable classrooms. An attempt was also to be made to implement a voluntary night school for high school students, and a pilot program of year-round education was to be implemented in a minimum of four elementary schools as soon as possible. The School Board accepted all of the recommendations.

This report summarizes the planning, preparation, and implementation efforts connected with the 45-15 pilot program from the time of the Board's decision to implement to April, 1974.

The decision to implement a pilot program of year-round education was made in November of 1971, and it was agreed at that time that the school district would need a minimum of 18 months to properly plan and prepare for implementation. Consequently, the target date for starting the program was set for June 18, 1973.

Virginia Beach elected to implement a cycled-attendance, year-round education program known as 45-15. The program was to be established strictly on a pilot basis to ascertain whether or not the public would accept the plan as a feasible means of solving the overcrowding problem in the city schools.

The 45-15 program takes its name from its method of cycling student attendance. Under the plan, students attend classes for 45 school days and then are on vacation for 15 school days. The cycles continue year-round with four cycles equaling a normal school year.

The participating schools are divided into four attendance groups. The groups begin the school year 15 days apart to start the 45-15 cycle. Once the cycle is in full operation, three groups attend classes at one time while the fourth is on a 15 day vacation. By dividing a school into four groups, one-third more students may be accommodated in the same amount of space. For example, if a traditional school, which can accommodate 900 students at one time, is divided into three groups of 300 and a fourth group of the same size is added to the school, 1200 students can be accommodated since 900 students attend classes while 300 are on a 15-day vacation.

While increased space was sufficient reason for considering the 45-15 calendar in Virginia Beach, there were other considerations that would contribute to the final determination of whether it was an acceptable alternative to school construction. The 45-15 plan had been tried in several school districts prior to the Virginia Beach program; but the lack of hard evidence of the outcomes of the other programs made it obvious that the experiences of the other districts could not be applied to Virginia Beach. Consequently, it was decided to implement 45-15 strictly on a pilot basis to generate decision-making data before committing all schools and resources to the program.

The public aspect of the planning and preparation phase of the Virginia Beach 45-15 program began on May 12, 1972. On that date, the State Department of Education announced that Virginia Beach would receive a $75,000 research and development grant for the first phase of the year-round pilot program.

A team of business management consultants from Old Dominion University of Norfolk, Virginia, was employed to construct and monitor a modified PERT/CPM network for the planning and preparation of the pilot program. Critical incidents were determined and task and role assignments were identified for all components of the school district. The components of the network were designed to meet the implementation date of June 18, 1973 for the two-year pilot program. The monitoring team submitted monthly formative reports and a summative evaluation in June of 1973 to the project administrator.

Among the earlier and most critical tasks was the construction of a year-round calendar. Consideration was given to the problems created by elementary pupils and secondary pupils in the same family being out of school at different times, and an effort was made to provide them with as many common holidays as possible. Traditional holidays, including Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter were planned to coincide in both the cycled-attendance and traditional schools. Concern for providing common family vacations coupled with the awareness that Virginia Beach is a water-oriented, summer resort community, led to the decision to also have a mid-July, two-week shutdown of the pilot schools. The shutdown ensured all families of a common vacation time for pupils in all grades and, when combined with the regular three-week break between attendance cycles, provided a total of five-weeks vacation during the summer months for each elementary pupil. To further relieve potential family interruptions, the decision was made to assign all elementary pupils in a family to the same attendance-vacation group.

Since the public knew very little about either the concept or the operation of a 45-15 plan or any other year-round education plan, a well organized program was established to inform the public. From the beginning, this program was meant only to inform the public about year-round education, not sell them on it.

The School Board felt that available evidence indicated that a program of year-round education would work in Virginia Beach, but it wanted the public to decide if such a program was acceptable to the community. Consequently, it was decided that the public would be told the facts about 45-15 and be allowed to make up its own mind about the advantages or disadvantages of the program. No educational advantages, cost saving, or operational benefits would be claimed for 45-15 since it was felt these could not be substantiated. The only claim that would be made was that 45-15 would provide additional classroom space.

The task of identifying schools in which the program could be implemented and the design of the public information program consumed much staff time during the spring and summer months of 1972. In July of that year, the staff designated eleven schools in areas of rapid growth as possible pilot schools. Pamphlets were written and slide/tape programs prepared for an intense public information effort in the attendance areas for each of the eleven schools. Approximately 245 presentations were given in private residences during a four-week period. Additionally, presentations were made to the School Board, the City Council; civic and fraternal groups, P.T.A.s, and military groups. Efforts were also made to inform the professional and classified staffs of the district. A special edition of the internal newsletter was published to explain the effects of 45-15 on personnel, and briefings were presented by the Personnel Department in every elementary school in the district. The news media extensively covered all activities of the program, and as the public information effort progressed, an outside research agent was contracted to conduct an independent assessment of the effectiveness and accuracy of the information the public received. In September of 1972, four of the eleven previously identified schools were designated to participate in the pilot program, and the major thrust of the informational effort was switched to the four pilot communities.

The schools selected for the pilot program were chosen by the School Board because they were located in a relatively compact geographic area which would facilitate implementation, administration, and evaluation of the program, and because the attendance areas were, in a domino-like arrangement, contiguous to one another. When the school selection was announced, parents were advised that six months before the program began they would be notified of the attendance group and calendar to which their children would be assigned. The advance notice was intended to give families time to make necessary vacation and child-care plans.

The assignment of pupils to attendance cycles and grades was one of the more complex tasks faced during the planning phase of the program. It was recognized early that the same number of pupils for a grade level did not live in each group attendance area for each of the schools.

While a logical solution to this problem in a traditional school would be to reduce the size of the individual classes and hire additional teachers to handle them, this was considered economically unrealistic and contrary to the purpose for 45-15 in Virginia Beach since it would require more classrooms and teachers. Consequently, to maintain reasonable class size, meet state requirement for pupil-teacher ratios, and take advantage of the space gains created by 45-15, a grade-combination plan was devised.

Students were to be regrouped in the 45-15 schools in much the same manner as they had been in the past in the city's elementary schools. The only difference was that instead of the regrouping taking place within particular grade levels, the assignments were made in multi-age groups. Second and third graders were grouped together as were fourth and fifth graders, and sixth and seventh graders, for such classes as social studies, science, health, physical education, art, and music. Additionally, students were regrouped according to achievement levels in language arts (spelling, reading, English) and math.

The year-round calendar and combined grade levels or as it came to be called, "multi-age grouping" caused some reorganization of the curriculum. Thirty-six teachers worked for eight weeks during the summer months of 1972 to devise a curriculum that was compatible with the cycled-attendance calendar and to provide for the grade combinations. While the curriculum

workers considered the calendar implication for retention, transfer, review, and continuous progress, their primary concern was maintaining quality of the existing program.

The pilot program was intended to determine the effect of cycled-attendance, year-round education on learning, the community, and the expenditure of capital and operational funds. The staff recommended and the Board approved the selection of external research agents to design and carry out an evaluation of program effect on each of the areas of concern. Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, was employed to evaluate the effect of 45-15 on pupil learning. It was decided that first and fourth grade students in the pilot schools would be tested with standardized tests over a two-year period. Reading readiness of first grade pupils and achievement in reading and mathematics of fourth graders would be evaluated. The test data was to be analyzed for longitudinal achievement changes within groups and across ability levels. In addition to learning outcomes, ETS was directed to evaluate the program effect on pupil attitude toward school. Fourth grade students were selected as subjects to be administered a standardized attitude scale. The test data was to be treated by statistical procedures which would look for differences in attitude across treatments, schools, and attendance-cycle groups.

The evaluation of community effect of 45-15 was divided into two discrete tasks. Schlechty Associates of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was employed to evaluate the attitude of parents toward the year-round operation of schools. Questionnaires were constructed for pre and post administration. The surveys were designed to be given to a total sample of parents from the pilot schools and a random sample of two control schools. In the initial survey, 2008 questionnaries were sent and 1991 were returned in the pilot schools. For the control schools, a random sample of 205 were sent and 199 returned. Of the respondents in the pilot schools, 31.7% characterized their pre-experience attitude toward the idea of 45-15 as "positive", 31.6% felt negatively, and 36.7% indicated that they were "undecided" about year-round schools.

The second task related to the community, that of finding out what impact 45-15 had on the youth-oriented institutional services and activities located in the pilot school area, was assigned to a team of consultants from Old Dominion University. The evaluation was to be conducted by questionnaire and interview techniques and the findings presented in a descriptive report.

To evaluate the effect of the pilot program on operational and capital expenditures, the Institute of Social Analysis of Columbia University was contracted to collect and compare baseline information on resource demands of the traditional school calendar and the 45-15 plan. The comparative data was to be used to analyze actual expenditures for one year and to project the financial impact over a five-year period.

While the early research design concerned itself with learning, community attitudes, and cost, it soon became apparent that other areas were in need of study. Soon after the program began, it was claimed that some positions in the pilot schools were experiencing an increase in the number, type, and frequency of tasks. To determine the validity of the claims, a team of business management consultants was contracted to conduct position audits of certain professional and classified positions in the pilot schools and comparison nine-month schools. The audit was designed to identify position tasks and determine the number and frequency of these tasks for each position.

The first audit, that of secretarial-clerical positions, was completed in November of 1973. The audit presented evidence that tasks done by that position required 2.07 persons in the pilot schools. Each pilot school had one full-time secretary and some part-time assistance. The evidence supported the claim that cycled-attendance increased the number, type, and frequency of tasks to be performed by the school secretary. Similar audits were to be conducted for administrative, library, custodial, and food service positions.

The staff in assigning pupils to the pilot schools made an effort to assign approximately twenty-five percent of each school's population to each of the four attendance groups, three of which would be in school at one time. Special emphasis was given to this task because disproportionate group size could cause the population of any three groups to exceed the capacity of the buildings. If that should happen, the theoretical 33⅓ percent increase in the number of students the individual schools could serve under 45-15 would be useless since there would be more students than available seats in the schools. There were several components of the Virginia Beach program that could have contributed to disproportionate group size and resulted in this type of in-school overcrowding. One factor was the commitment to have all elementary children in the same family on the same attendance cycle. Other factors were transfers in and out of the district, the uncertainty of the home construction industry and resulting population increases, and the commitment to assign pupils by geographic neighborhoods. Because the School Board had intended to create space with the cycled-attendance operation, it was decided to study the discrepancy between the theoretical and actual increase in space.

With a $100,000 State Department grant for operation, the pilot program of year-round education began on June 18, 1973, with assurances from the PERT/CPM monitoring team that the planning and preparation was on schedule. Within 45 school days, some 5000 children in grades K - 7 had attended classes in the pilot schools.

As of the publication of this report, the program was operating as designed with the research agencies continuing their collection of data to aid in the School Board's decision to continue, expand, or terminate the 45-15 plan in Virginia Beach. No unique or unanticipated problems have arisen; the students have participated in several vacation and attendance cycles, the school staffs have reacted favorably to the program, and the community has apparently adopted a "wait and see" attitude, all in anticipation of the School Board's final decision on 45-15 which is expected in November of 1974.